



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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August 15, 2012

Mr. David Libman
National Park Service
Regional Office,
Planning & Compliance Division,
100 Alabama St.
1924 BLDG,
Atlanta, GA 3030317

Subject: Control # DES 11-63: Fort Matanzas National Monument (NM) – General Management Plan (GMP) 12; Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).
CEQ No. 20120195 & ERP No. NPS-E61082-FL.

Dear Mr. Libman:

To fulfill EPA's Clean Air Act (CAA) § 309 and National Environmental Policy Act § 102(2)(C) (NEPA) responsibilities, EPA reviewed the above DEIS for the proposed action: the GMP. We are giving this DEIS a "Lack of Objections" rating, see enclosed "Summary of the EPA Rating System." Included below are comments we believe will strengthen the final EIS (FEIS) to meet NEPA's mandate.

Proposed Action: the GMP will provide guidance for the next 20 plus years on perpetuating natural systems, preserving cultural resources, and providing a quality visitor-experience opportunity for this NM. According to the DEIS, any proposed development consistent with the proposed action would require feasibility studies, detailed planning, and environmental documentation. GMP implementation is dependent upon available resources and consequently may occur in phases over many years.

Description: Fort Matanzas consists of nearly 300 acres on Rattlesnake and Anastasia Islands, three historic structures: the Fort, Visitor Center, HQ administrative buildings, and the Johnson House, and the Matanzas Ramp: the Atlantic Ocean beach access road. The NM is located 14 miles south of the City of St. Augustine, Florida.

Purpose & Need: The GMP's purpose is to decide how the National Park Service (NPS) can best fulfill the NM's purpose, maintain its significance, and protect its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations. This action is needed to update the outdated 1982 Fort Matanzas GMP as both the National Parks and Recreation Act and NPS policy mandate development of a GMP for each park.

Alternatives: The DEIS indicates five issues helped to steer the development of preliminary alternatives.¹ The visitor center space inadequacy, the recent closure of the beach to driving off designated roads, the insufficient visitor parking, visitor concern over the natural environment's

¹ P. 19.

health, and the challenge of partnering with the neighboring state parks and forests, conservation areas, and preserves were the identified five issues.

EPA Comments: the GMP appears to provide minimal if any focus on visitor concern over the natural environment's health and the challenge of partnering with the local state parks and forests, conservation areas, and preserves. The GMP appeared to focus on a different issue: providing varying degrees of cultural and natural resource interpretation opportunities.

- EPA recommends the alternatives chapter (2) further address the issues concerning natural environment's health and the partnering challenge.
 - EPA suggests the NPS consider discussing in the FEIS the concerns raised during the public meetings and in the scoping comments and how the proposed GMP alternatives address these concerns.
- EPA suggests the NPS consider "climate change," likely a common concern to all entities mentioned, as a partnering opportunity for collaboration. For example, developing a partnership to share in the following activities:
 - monitor changes and associated impacts to define climate change related cause and effect relationships,
 - identify ecosystem services provided by all entities, e.g., flooding protection during severe events and the potential for being a CO₂ sink to facilitate the climate change adaption and mitigation at the regional level, and
 - research of potential climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies that could be used by all coastal entities in the southeast.

The DEIS discusses three alternatives: the no action alternative (A), NPS-preferred/the environmentally preferred alternative (B), and alternative C. The major differences between the three alternatives appear to center on three issues: the visitor center, parking space, and degree of cultural and natural resource interpretation opportunities.

EPA Comment: the DEIS identified four options for addressing the inadequate visitor center in the purpose and need chapter (1) but did not evaluate all of these in the alternatives evaluated in the alternatives chapter (2). Chapter 2 does not address two options: physically expanding the existing building or replacing it with a new facility. The no action alternative provides for the status quo while both alternatives B and C propose supplementing existing visitor center space with space added by adaptive re-use of existing structures.²

- EPA recommends Chapter 2 either discuss all four options for addressing the inadequate space or explain why the two options identified in Chapter 1 were not considered in the alternatives analysis in Chapter 2. EPA notes Chapter 2 did not discuss these two options in its section on alternatives considered but dismissed from detailed evaluation.³

Environmental Impacts: The majority the NM is located within the 100-year flood plain. The islands associated with the NM are barrier islands. Roughly half of the total park (147.4 acres) is mapped as wetlands and approximately 100 of these wetlands acres are on Rattlesnake Island. The main body of water in the vicinity of the Fort is the Matanzas River which is characterized as an estuarine, subtidal wetland with unconsolidated bottom.

² P. 21.

³ P. 70.

EPA Comment: EPA finds it difficult to compare environmental impacts among the three alternatives evaluated. For example,

- Under the subheading “Potential Cultural Landscapes” (Alternative B), is the unexpected mention of a parking expansion for two bus spaces.⁴
 - The alternatives chapter (2) indicates the bus space expansion is proposed for alternative A⁵ not B. Moreover, no discussion of the proposed bus spaces potential environmental impacts exists in the environmental consequences chapter (4) for alternative A.⁶
- The environmental consequence chapter (4) discusses additional impacts from construction of off-beach parking for both alternative A & B⁷, yet Chapter 2 does not indicate construction of off-beach parking will occur for either alternative.
 - Chapter 4 in its alternative A discussion⁸ states, *Very few additional impacts to soils would result from clearing and construction for off-beach parking at the Matanzas ramp.*
 - Yet Chapter 2 indicates for
 - Alternative A, parking lot design changes have been implemented for safety and 2 bus spaces will be added to the visitor center parking lot,⁹ and for
 - Alternative B, the number of parking lots in the existing parking foot print would be increased and expansion of other lots could occur.
 - EPA recommends the FEIS describe the degree of expansion, e.g., quantify (acres).
- EPA recommends the FEIS be written to improve upon the DEIS’ current alternative comparisons of environmental impacts.

EPA Comment: EPA recommends the DEIS quantify where possible the impacts and consider including in its GMP development obtaining any lacking data to quantify future impacts.

The GMP describes performance indicators and standards to ensure desired conditions are being attained, e.g., number of vehicles driving outside authorized areas, number of car clouting incidents, etc.,¹⁰ but does not use these indicators to quantify impacts associated with the proposed action.

- The DEIS describes how many visitors come to the NM but doesn’t provide the number of cars to describe (quantify) the current impact and how the proposed alternatives will alleviate the current impact. Currently there are four parking lots available.
 - EPA recommends the EIS quantify where possible the anticipated environmental impacts associated with its proposed action. Examples of quantification are provided below recommended to be addressed in the EIS.
 - How many cars can be parked under alternative A, and expected to be parked under alternatives B, and C.
 - How many cars park on shoulders under alternative A, and expected to be parked under alternatives B, and C.

⁴ P. 118.

⁵ P. 39.

⁶ PP. 105 – 116.

⁷ P. 118.

⁸ P. 107.

⁹ P. 39.

¹⁰ Table 2, pp. 31-32.

- EPA recommends the FEIS address the potential displacement of parking associated with the recent closure of the beach to driving/parking. For example, how many cars are being displaced from off-road/parking areas that now may require parking in the designated existing parking lots?
- The FEIS is encouraged to address whether there are outside parking lots where arrangements can be made to shuttle visitors. Could this be a partnering opportunity with the neighboring state parks, forests, conservation areas, reserves, other entities, etc., to share parking areas and shuttle visitors between these entities?
- The impacts associated with the closure of off-road vehicles has environmental impacts that EPA recommends be discussed in the DEIS. For example,
 - The DEIS indicates impacts to fishermen without quantifying how many fishermen are affected.
 - The DEIS should discuss the impacts associated from not having the fishermen drive off road. For example,
 - The DEIS describes *the ocean beach at Fort Matanzas provides a nesting area for the threatened loggerhead and endangered green and leatherback sea turtles, the ghost crab, least tern, Wilson's plover and other migratory shorebirds and seabirds, including the endangered piping plover.*"
 - The DEIS describes state-protected species, i.e., Black Skimmer and Least Tern, that prefer nesting on open sand on beaches.
 - EPA encourages NPS to develop indicators to measure changes in these protected species populations to describe future impacts associated with the recently enacted off-road vehicle closure. Particularly since driving on the beach has been occurring since the advent of the automobile, possibly prior to the NM's establishment in 1924, and large numbers of visitors have indicated their preference for retaining access by vehicle to the beach. This data would prove valuable for NEPA purposes should NPS reconsider and seek authority to permit driving on the beach.

EPA Comment: EPA recommends further clarification in the FEIS on the identified environmental impacts to the NM.

- For example Table 6, Summary of Impacts,¹¹ under the preferred and environmentally preferred alternative B, to plant communities and vegetation are described as "local, short- and long-term, direct, minor and adverse" when compared to the no action alternative A, "long-term, adverse, negligible to minor, and localized."
 - EPA suggests the FEIS explain what does this means in context of the NM and its mission and how this is it significant.
- For example, the DEIS describes invasion by exotic/nuisance species¹² but there is no information describing the status quo, e.g., how many acres are and how densely invaded (affected environment) by exotic/nuisance species. Nor explains why this is considered to be minor. And how is that expected to change with each alternative evaluated. EPA recommends the DEIS provide more quantification and explanation to better describe the impacts.

¹¹ PP. 55 – 60.

¹² P. 108.

- EPA recommends the FEIS define its terminology, e.g., short and long term, adverse, negligible, minor, localized, significant impacts, etc., in context of each cultural and natural resource evaluated.

EPA Comment: EPA finds the one issue raised in the DEIS having the most potential to significantly impact the NM during the GMP's project life is the issue of increasingly diminished opportunities for the public to access the beaches, which is increasing parking pressures and collateral impacts upon the NM resource.

- The DEIS states *the resulting extra parking spaces would be beneficial to traffic circulation; however, parking would likely continue to be an issue for the park without significant increase in parking opportunities.*¹³
 - EPA's perspective is the above statement indicates the seriousness of the parking issue which does not appear to be addressed by the proposed action.
- The DEIS states *Public access to the beach is a growing problem in the area with the increase in condominiums; the public access areas have been diminished.*¹⁴
- EPA recommends the GMP include indicators to measure parking pressures upon the NM associated with declining public beach access associated with development.
- EPA recommends the GMP discuss how the NPS mission is impacted if it is the default option to providing public beach access to replace the access reduced by private development. The DEIS states *Regional growth is expected to result in increased development in the vicinity of the monument.*¹⁵
- EPA recommends the minor discussion contained in the DEIS' cumulative effects discussion be expanded to fully discuss the potential parking needs associated with loss of formerly public beach access and its associated impacts to the GMP's purpose: to decide how NPS can best maintain the NM's significance and protect its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

We thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this DEIS. If you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me (404-562-9611 or Mueller.heinz@epa.gov) or Beth Walls (404-562-8309 or walls.beth@epa.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,



Heinz J. Mueller, Chief
NEPA Program Office
Office of Policy and Management

Enclosure: EPA Rating System

¹³ P. 116.

¹⁴ P. 102.

¹⁵ P. 114.

SUMMARY OF RATING DEFINITIONS AND FOLLOW UP ACTION ¹

Environmental Impact of the Action

LO-Lack of Objections

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

EC-Environmental Concerns

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impacts. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EO-Environmental Objections

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that must be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EU-Environmentally Unsatisfactory

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS state, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the CEQ.

Adequacy of the Impact Statement

Category 1-Adequate

The EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collecting is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category 2-Insufficient Information

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for the EPA to fully assess the environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category 3-Inadequate

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant

¹ From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of the Federal Actions Impacting the Environment.